



Supervisor's Office
3005 E. Camino del Bosque
Silver City
NM 88061

Loretta Benavidez
Public Information Officer
(505) 388-8245 office
(505) 538-1426 cell
lbenavidez@fs.fed.us

Lightning Storms Spark Fires on Gila National Forest

(Silver City, NM – May 17, 2006) - Lightning storms that passed through the area on Monday night sparked nine new fires on the Gila National Forest. Three fires were discovered on the Quemado Ranger District, four on the Reserve Ranger District; one on the Black Range Ranger District and one on the Glenwood Ranger District. As fire managers assessed the fires, appropriate management response was carefully evaluated, and led to the decision to identify four of the new starts as wildland fire use candidates. The Saliz and Plaza fires south of Reserve; the Pine fire (first discovered on Tuesday, but not seen since then), 30 miles southeast of Reserve, NM; and the Taylor fire 48 miles west of Truth or Consequences, NM, will likely be managed for resource benefits. “The Taylor fire, is in proximity of private land, however poses no threat. It is bordered by areas that have been previously treated, so risks of managing it as a wildland fire use event are minimal. The private landowner is supportive of the management strategy for this fire,” said Toby Richards, District Fire Management Officer on the Black Range Ranger District.

The Gila National Forest is currently in Stage I Fire and Smoking restrictions. Open campfires are limited to designated campgrounds only and smoking is prohibited, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site, or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is cleared of flammable material. The list of campgrounds where campfires are still allowed is listed within the official order 06-248, which is posted on the website at:

<http://www2.srs.fs.fed.us/r3/gila/fire/forestclosure.asp>.

The restrictions help prevent unwanted person-caused fires. While wildfire prevention measures are essential to mitigate the negative effects of unwanted fires in undesirable locations, there are some fires that can result in resource benefits to other areas, given the right conditions. “When hosting a wildland fire use event, naturally-ignited fires are managed to accomplish specific resource

objectives, but prior to the start of the fire, we must have determined what that all operations can be carried out safely and we clearly state what the resource management objectives are,” said Paul Womack, Reserve District Fire Management Officer. “Extensive planning precedes the event, which includes identifying geographic areas for wildland fire use events, assessing risk, predicting fire behavior and growth, and planning for contingency resources. The maximum limits or boundaries of the fire are also defined and plans are made for keeping the fire within those limits,” Womack added.

In the past two days, 7 Forest Service engines, 1 helicopter, 2 hotshot crews, 8 smokejumpers, and 1 air tanker with 2,500 gallons of retardant have responded to the five wildfires that were being suppressed, totaling about 80 personnel. The number of acres, to date for the fires: Whiskey, Mata, Caballiza, Seep and Turkey, is about 45.

As the season progresses on the Gila National Forest, fire managers will implement a wide range of strategies that will result in appropriate types of response for each unique situation. Some fires will be suppressed, some will be managed for resource benefits and, with continued help and support from neighboring communities and Forest visitors, some fires will be *prevented*.

For more information about the current fire activity on the Gila National Forest, contact the Information Office at 388-8245 or visit the website at www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila.

Information about all current federal and state land restrictions and closures in New Mexico and Arizona can be found by visiting the website:

http://gacc.nifc.gov/swcc/information/firerestrictions/restrictions_closures.htm

###